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ABSTRACT

In response to increasing difficulty in finding qualified candidates for entry-level positions, the Aetna company has developed an Adult Training and Employment program. This program (1) trains, hires, and retains nontraditional candidates from the area's public and private agencies; (2) focuses on issues that affect this population's ability to fit into the corporate environment; (3) encourages use of services and expertise from agencies that market these candidates; (4) encourages training and hiring of near-qualified candidates and provides necessary technical, administrative, and human resource skills to unskilled candidates; (5) provides coaching and counseling to aid candidates with social issues; and (6) encourages divisions to hire these candidates for full-time, regular positions. High need, high turnover, difficult-to-staff areas of the company are targeted for participation in this program. Agencies working with Aetna are expected to screen candidates for the company and refer them based on certain criteria--primarily attitude and skill level. These candidates are hired conditionally and placed in a training program at the Aetna Institute. The Institute also provides training and coaching techniques for the hiring supervisors to help them understand the needs and issues of their nontraditional employees and increase supervisors' ability to retain them. This program is helping the company to attract, train, and retain a new work force. (KC)

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CORPORATE HUMAN RESOURCES

ADULT TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

PROGRAM DESCRIPTION

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INTRODUCTION

Changing demographics have already started to affect our country's labor force. In the Hartford area we are experiencing the repercussions of a decreasing and underskilled labor market -- candidates who are available are less skilled and have less job-experience than in previous history. Filling entry-level, service-oriented positions with qualified candidates is increasingly becoming our greatest staffing problem at Aetna. We have found it difficult to fill positions in food services, printing services, mail and transportation, claim processing and secretarial support services.

This paper will introduce a model that begins to address Aetna's staffing difficulties by creating and securing a qualified pool of entry level candidates for permanent positions.

The objectives of this model are to identify areas within the company that are experiencing difficulty staffing positions with qualified candidates; develop a pool of qualified candidates by utilizing non-traditional individuals and assisting these candidates in overcoming social barriers that prevent them from integrating and succeeding in a work environment; develop receptivity in hiring areas for non-traditional candidates; and collaborate efforts with external agencies (any organization that serves the "least-well-served" population, non-or for-profit) that support the development and recruitment of non-traditional individuals for Aetna employment.

HISTORICAL PERSPECTIVE

Historically, Aetna has developed and maintained relationships with public and private agencies that support non-traditional candidates in developing skills and/or seeking employment. From a philanthropic perspective, the Aetna has been very supportive. As an employer, we have been less successful since the majority of these candidates do not possess the requisite skills that are necessary to qualify for positions at the Aetna. These candidates are more commonly rejected.

NEW PERSPECTIVE - ADULT TRAINING AND EMPLOYMENT

We are becoming more creative in our approaches to staffing our organization. We are improving our internal and external marketing strategies, and focusing on developing our "human resource".

An Adult Training and Employment Program has been designed to implement a process that trains, hires and retains non-traditional candidates of our community's public and private agencies. It focuses on issues that affect this population's ability to successfully transition into the corporate environment; it encourages utilization of services and expertise from agencies that market these candidates; it encourages training and hiring of near-qualified candidates and provides necessary technical, administrative and human resource skills to unskilled candidates; it provides coaching and counseling to aid candidates with social issues; and it encourages Divisions to hire these candidates for full-time, regular positions.

In effect this model begins to create an environment and image that clearly demonstrates that non-traditional employees can succeed and progress in the Company.

TARGET AREAS

Statistical data, recruiter's evaluations and management's own assessment indicate that some departments are having serious difficulty attracting and retaining employees. Corporate Staffing's strategy is to target high need, high turnover and difficult-to-staff areas for participation in this program.

SCREEN/HIRE

As mentioned above, we currently have relationships of varying degrees, with a number of for-profit and non-profit community based organizations. There are a number of agencies with whom Aetna has worked in the past, but not in recent years. These relationships are being renewed. We are also expanding the number of agencies we work with in order to develop the pool of candidates necessary for Aetna.

Agencies working with Aetna are expected to pre-screen candidates for Aetna and refer them based on certain criteria -- primarily attitudinal and skill level. Candidates must be able to achieve, at the minimum, fifth grade competency in reading, writing and math and possess a strong desire to work and learn in order to be considered eligible for Aetna's Adult Training and Employment Program. Corporate Staffing works with the Aetna Institute to determine and administer appropriate skill assessment methods. Candidates who meet the requisite criteria are hired as Aetna employees by Corporate Staffing and placed into a training program appropriate to their needs. Their hiring is <u>conditional</u> based upon successful completion of their training, the Aetna Institute's assessment, supervisory assessment and attitude, attendance and dependability.

Candidates are placed into one of the following three profiles for training and job placement purposes:

- Level 1:
  - .low to no job skills/experience
  - .below average (9th grade) competency in reading, writing and math
  - .highly motivated
- Level 2:
  - .low to average job skills
  - .limited to no job experience
  - .average competencies in reading, writing and math
  - .highly motivated
- Level 3:
  - .average to above average skilled
  - .limited to no job experience
  - .hold high school, certificate program, or college degree

EDUCATION/TRAINING

In light of the cross-section of public and private agencies in the Greater Hartford area, we are aware that not all are equipped to provide formal training. Within this Program, education/training is essential to the success of the candidate and the hiring department.

For the purpose of clarification, "training" will refer to specific skills development and "education" will refer to courses/resources which focus on creating an understanding of how the Corporation works, as well as appropriate behavioral development for both the employee and employer i.e., diversity and socialization issues. Upon initial screening and selection of "trainees", the Aetna Institute assesses their skill development needs based on the position for which they have been selected. Appropriate technical training and "World of Work" education is provided by the Aetna Institute. During the trainees training period, the Aetna Institute provides regular evaluation of their performance and abilities. (Note: It is understood that adjustments between trainees and the position for which they were initially selected may be required. However, their performance and abilities will determine this.)

The trainee is not the only one in need of training. The Aetna Institute also provides diversity training and coaching techniques for the hiring supervisors. The training helps supervisors understand the needs and issues of their non-traditional employees and works to increase supervisors' ability to retain them as employees.

PLACEMENT/HIRE

Proper job placement is just as critical as candidate referral, screening and training. A trainee who is not fully qualified for a position is placed in a job with the cooperation of the hiring supervisor. The trainee receives "on-the-job training" while, in some cases, continuing training at the Aetna Institute. This helps trainees to "cement" the skills that they have already acquired. During this "qualifying period," Corporate Staffing continues their salary for up to a total of four months from their initial date of hire. Hiring areas are required to commit to their employment and salary at that time.

Trainees who have demonstrated high achievement during their training program are placed in jobs that are considered "fast-track". The fast-track concept is intended to encourage employee retention by enabling a high achiever to be promoted quickly, i.e., class level 18-20 in one year or less, class levels 20-23 in one to 1.5 years, etc. Corporate Staffing works with hiring areas to develop these opportunities.

COUNSELING SERVICES

In order to be free to learn and progress, one must be free of worry.... Many of the trainees are AFDC recipients or recipients of other benefits which are reduced or discontinued after they become employed. In some cases, trainees are not able to earn the equivalent dollar amount that they were provided by state or city assistance programs, at least initially. Subsidized income is, at times, required. Since there are a number of different programs available and departments of the government involved, Aetna assists these individuals to transcend into the workplace by providing appropriate counseling services. In such cases, Aetna establishes links with a number of state and municipal departments.

In addition, trainees who are having difficulty assimilating into their departments or the workplace culture in general, need additional coaching/counseling. Aetna provides them with the appropriate support resources through their first year of employment in order to retain them as employees.

SUMMARY

By establishing relations with agencies that support Aetna's resource needs, identifying departments with high turnover/staffing needs and utilizing the Aetna Institute's resources, as well as those of other areas, Corporate Staffing has positioned itself to attract, train and retain a new workforce -- thus creating a consistent flow of qualified candidates for Aetna jobs.